

Glencoe, IL. - U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk (R-Highland Park) called for tough new pollution controls following a disturbing report detailing high levels of mercury pollution in the rainwater falling on Chicago's North Shore.

Details on mercury pollution in rainwater were included in a new report by the National Wildlife Federation (NWF). Eight rain samples taken at the Chicago Botanic Gardens in Glencoe and Rosenthal Manufacturing in Northbrook contained mercury pollution that greatly exceeds levels the EPA considers safe in surface water, jeopardizing the health of people and wildlife.

"Capping mercury emissions and banning new sources of mercury pollution are needed measures to reduce the risk mercury poses in our Great Lakes and across the nation," said Congressman Kirk.

"This report highlights water samples taken in April and May that contained three times the normally-occurring level of mercury in our rainwater. One in 12 American mothers already tests positive for mercury in their bodies above EPA standards. This is why I will introduce federal pollution control legislation that will cap national mercury emissions and create even stricter standards for emissions near the Great Lakes."

During a tour of the Botanic Gardens where the rainwater testing had occurred Kirk said, "protecting the people of Illinois means taking the lead in Washington to pass new pollution control legislation to protect our long term health. My new bill -- the Mercury Pollution Act - will substantially lower the amount of mercury industry can emit with even stricter standards for pollution near the Great Lakes."

The NWF report measured mercury concentration in rain samples collected between April 21 and May 2. Average levels at both North Shore sites were more than three times the EPA safe levels for surface waters. Mercury levels in rain are not reported dangerous to those who drink rainwater or get it on their skin. The harm occurs when mercury is concentrated in fish that people eat.

The Centers for Disease Control estimates about 14,000 babies in Illinois are born each year at

risk of neurological damage due to mercury.

"The amount of mercury in a thermometer -- about a 70th of a teaspoon -- s enough to contaminate a 25 acre lake," said Congressman Kirk. "Already, many species of Lake Michigan fish are rated not fit for consumption due to mercury contamination. Airborne mercury that settles into the lake is the leading source of this pollution. We are at risk and our children are at greater risk if we do nothing to reduce mercury pollution," Kirk said.

In the last Congress, Kirk authored the Great Lakes Mercury Elimination Act calling for no new permits for facilities that would dump mercury into the lake. Kirk also played a vital role calling for new pollution controls and moving a proposed North Shore Sanitary District sludge-burning factory that would have emitted mercury into Lake Michigan.